

## **Russia-Middle East: The influence of the Arab factor on the formation of muslim education system in the Republic of Tatarstan in 1990-2000**

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### **Abstract**

With the creation in 1992 of the first independent religious structure in Post-Soviet Tatarstan - the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Tatarstan - there was an urgent need to train imams and mudarrises for the mosques, madrasahs and maktabas of Tatarstan. The ties between Kazan, Bukhara and Tashkent - the traditional centres of training of Tatar imams - were broken after the disintegration of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR); as a result, the absence of religious schools demanded a search for new approaches. Help was received from various Arab funds and patrons, mainly from the Gulf States. At their expense, hundreds of young Muslim Tatars were trained abroad. Through the example of the events which took place in the religious sphere in Tatarstan in the last twenty years, we can see the attitude of the government to the problem of foreign Muslim education change from neutral and sometimes optimistic to highly negative. Attempts to ban the activities of imams who had graduated from foreign higher education institutions were made, but none of them led to any desirable results. On the whole a cautious attitude to this group of Islamic figures still remains: SAM of RT conducts various courses to retrain them according to local religious traditions, and tries not to permit them to occupy high positions in the system of the Spiritual Administration. Nevertheless, a gradual process of rehabilitation of graduates of foreign higher education institutions is taking place, as well as their social adaptation within the Muslim Ummah. New groups of shakirds go to Arab countries only after studying the fundamentals of Islam and local traditions on the basis of Tatarstan religious educational institutions. The stream of trainees is gradually decreasing, though there is still a need to obtain full higher religious education from the largest Islamic centres of the world.

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### **Keywords**

Islam in Tatarstan, Muslim education, Republic of Tatarstan, Russia-Middle East